

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on the Resignation of General Stanley A. McChrystal as Commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan

June 23, 2010

Good afternoon. Today I accepted General Stanley McChrystal's resignation as commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. I did so with considerable regret, but also with certainty that it is the right thing for our mission in Afghanistan, for our military, and for our country.

I'm also pleased to nominate General David Petraeus to take command in Afghanistan, which will allow us to maintain the momentum and leadership that we need to succeed.

I don't make this decision based on any difference in policy with General McChrystal, as we are in full agreement about our strategy. Nor do I make this decision out of any sense of personal insult. Stan McChrystal has always shown great courtesy and carried out my orders faithfully. I've got great admiration for him and for his long record of service in uniform.

Over the last 9 years, with America fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he has earned a reputation as one of our Nation's finest soldiers. That reputation is founded upon his extraordinary dedication, his deep intelligence, and his love of country. I relied on his service, particularly in helping to design and lead our new strategy in Afghanistan. So all Americans should be grateful for General McChrystal's remarkable career in uniform.

But war is bigger than any one man or woman, whether a private, a general, or a President. And as difficult as it is to lose General McChrystal, I believe that it is the right decision for our national security.

The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general. It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system, and it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan.

My multiple responsibilities as Commander in Chief led me to this decision. First, I have a responsibility to the extraordinary men and women who are fighting this war and to the democratic institutions that I've been elected to lead. I've got no greater honor than serving as Commander in Chief of our men and women in uniform, and it is my duty to ensure that no diversion complicates the vital mission that they are carrying out.

That includes adherence to a strict code of conduct. The strength and greatness of our military is rooted in the fact that this code applies equally to newly enlisted privates and to the general officer who commands them. That allows us to come together as one. That is part of the reason why America has the finest fighting force in the history of the world.

It is also true that our democracy depends upon institutions that are stronger than individuals. That includes strict adherence to the military chain of command and respect for civilian control over that chain of command. And that's why, as Commander in Chief, I believe this decision is necessary to hold ourselves accountable to standards that are at the core of our democracy.

Second, I have a responsibility to do what is—whatever is necessary to succeed in Afghanistan and in our broader effort to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida. I believe that

this mission demands unity of effort across our alliance and across my national security team. And I don't think that we can sustain that unity of effort and achieve our objectives in Afghanistan without making this change. That too has guided my decision.

I've just told my national security team that now is the time for all of us to come together. Doing so is not an option, but an obligation. And I welcome debate among my team, but I won't tolerate division. All of us have personal interests; all of us have opinions; our politics often fuels conflict. But we have to renew our sense of common purpose and meet our responsibilities to one another and to our troops who are in harm's way and to our country.

We need to remember what this is all about: Our Nation is at war. We face a very tough fight in Afghanistan. But Americans don't flinch in the face of difficult truths or difficult tasks. We persist, and we persevere. We will not tolerate a safe haven for terrorists who want to destroy Afghan society from within and launch attacks against innocent men, women, and children in our country and around the world.

So make no mistake: We have a clear goal. We are going to break the Taliban's momentum. We are going to build Afghan capacity. We are going to relentlessly apply pressure on Al Qaida and its leadership, strengthening the ability of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to do the same.

That's the strategy that we agreed to last fall; that is the policy that we are carrying out in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In that effort, we are honored to be joined by allies and partners who have stood by us and paid the ultimate price through the loss of their young people at war. They are with us because the interests and values that we share and because this mission is fundamental to the ability of free people to live in peace and security in the 21st century.

Now, General Petraeus and I were able to spend some time this morning discussing the way forward. I am extraordinarily grateful that he has agreed to serve in this new capacity. It should be clear to everybody, he does so at great personal sacrifice to himself and to his family. And he is setting an extraordinary example of service and patriotism by assuming this difficult post.

Let me say to the American people, this is a change in personnel, but it is not a change in policy. General Petraeus fully participated in our review last fall, and he both supported and helped design the strategy that we have in place. In his current post at Central Command, he has worked closely with our forces in Afghanistan, he has worked closely with Congress, he has worked closely with the Afghan and Pakistan Governments and with all our partners in the region. He has my full confidence, and I am urging the Senate to confirm him for this new assignment as swiftly as possible.

Let me conclude by saying that it was a difficult decision to come to the conclusion that I've made today. Indeed, it saddens me to lose the service of a soldier who I've come to respect and admire. But the reasons that led me to this decision are the same principles that have supported the strength of our military and our Nation since the founding.

So once again, I thank General McChrystal for his enormous contributions to the security of this Nation and to the success of our mission in Afghanistan. I look forward to working with General Petraeus and my entire national security team to succeed in our mission. And I reaffirm that America stands as one in our support for the men and women who defend it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command.

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